# Discussion Document on the Future Role of the Media Arts Network of Ontario/Réseau des arts médiatiques de l'Ontario

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## A. The Context

**1. Mandate and Role of the Media Arts Network of Ontario**

Founded in 2008, the Media Arts Network of Ontario, Réseau des arts médiatiques de l'Ontario (MANO/RAMO) is an arts service organization and collective whose mandate is to develop and foster a unified and responsive provincial network for Ontario Media Arts organizations and the independent artists they represent. MANO/RAMO currently represents 24 Ontario-based independent Media Arts organizations and collectives (production centres, distributors, festivals and exhibitors in film, video and new media), to which it provides communication, advocacy, networking, collaborative exchange, and educational opportunities.

MANO/RAMO's vision is informed by the value that comes from a rich and vibrant cultural landscape. This includes the continued diversity of artistic and cultural expression offered by independent film, video, audio and new Media Arts. These forms of expression provide necessary alternatives to mainstream, commercial and institutional ideologies. It is the organization's belief that community engagement with diverse artistic practices improves quality of life by promoting cultural understanding and respect at all levels of society.

Through its work, MANO/RAMO aims to create a new model for arts service activity that is active, responsive, collaborative and innovative. By working together, the provincial Media Arts community can be transformed into a mobilized and active network of organizations who can respond to challenges and effectively promote the Media Arts to the wider community.

The Media Arts sector is a vital contributor to the vigorous economy and culture here in Ontario and MANO/RAMO is committed to garnering greater support and profile for the sector in the province's cultural policy.

**2. Consultations with the Community in Ontario**

Following a number of successful initiatives that brought the Ontario Media Arts community together to share and discuss priorities, MANO/RAMO has embarked on an ambitious series of community consultations throughout the province. These consultations are aimed at garnering the views of member organizations in order to develop a new strategic plan for the organization. Within this context, MANO/RAMO has developed the following document as a tool for discussion in this process.

## B. Key Issues

### 1. Impact of New Digital Technologies

The place of digital media within disciplinary practices has become increasingly integrated into disciplinary aesthetics as these have become more commonplace in our lives, but nowhere is the impact so profound as in the Media Arts.[1]

As noted in a recent study conducted for the network of Canadian Public Arts Funders (CPAF), while most disciplines have integrated digital technologies to some extent, the greatest impact has been felt in the Media Arts, where practices which are inherently based in media technologies have been transformed by the creative, production, exhibition and dissemination possibilities afforded by new technologies, the critical questions they raise, and the opportunities for collaboration with researchers in connected fields.

### 1.1. New Artistic Practices

The Media Arts also embody new artistic practices arising from the new digital toolbox: new cinematic experiences – immersive, digitally animated, interactive, or online; networked experiments such as telepresence; online communities gathered around game play, open source technology development, mixed or augmented reality experience; and new machines – DIY robots, and sophisticated immersive screens.

These developments have encouraged new research questions for arts practice, fuelling greater collaboration between artists and technologists in industry and science, for example in technology design or "bio-art".

Artists are not only using new technologies, they are creating them. Media Labs – artist-run and university based - have emerged as new creative spaces for active engagement in the development of new technologies and technological tools for creative expression: distributed online communities of open source software developers (i.e. PureData, GridFlow), and new hardware and technology design (i.e. 360 degree cinema in the Sato-sphere – a domed interactive theatre developed by artists and technologists working at the Societe des arts technologiques). Advanced experimental production is often undertaken in partnership with collaborators who have access to facilities to support new media research and production.

As noted by the Conseil des arts et lettres du Québec, "With the arrival of digital technologies, the boundary between several domains (for example, art, science, technology, industry, etc.) becomes particularly unstable while artistic practices are more multifaceted and in flux." [Translated by author.][2]

For its part, the Conseil québecois des arts médiatiques (CQAM), in its submission to the federal government's consultation on a national digital strategy, stated,

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[1] *The Shape of Things to Come: Mapping CPAF Members' Support for Mulitdisciplinary Arts*, MDR Burgess Consultants for the Canada Council for the Arts, 2009

[2] *Option numérique : document de consultation*, Conseil des arts et lettres du Québec (CALQ), June 2011, p. 1. The original French language text reads, "Avec l'arrivée des technologies numériques, la frontière entre plusieurs domaines (ex : art, science, technologie, industrie, etc.) devient particulièrement instable alors que les pratiques et les disciplines artistiques sont d'autant plus multiformes et en mouvance."

"This sector, which has several names – Media Arts, digital arts, technological arts, new media, audio art – is the only artistic discipline to appropriate the processes, tools, technologies and content delivery mechanisms of our digital society through the totality of the life cycle of a work of art. The creation, production and dissemination of works of art are inseparable from computer programming, digital tools and technologies and the new transmission networks." [Translated by author.] [3]

These observations extend to the Cultural Human Resource Council, which noted the fundamental symbiosis between digital media and technology innovation, stating in one report, "It is important to note that the Digital Media industry uses "content" and "technology" in a symbiotic manner. Content "pushes" technology innovation, and emerging technologies birth new products, applications, and services. One does not exist without the other."[4]

Film and video art are also being transformed by new digital media. Distinctions between film, video and audio art forms are also blurring as sound artists collaborate with video artists to create immersive live experiences. The financing of independent film is also evolving in this environment. For example in the US, new possibilities exist for modular distribution strategies on multiple platforms and incremental financing. Crowd-funding platforms have proven effective for some documentarists.[5]

## 1.2 Media Arts Leadership

The innovations and creative renewal in the Media Arts are evidence of leadership in the "digital tsunami" affecting the entire cultural sector.[6] A study conducted for the Australia Council for the Arts stated, "Media Arts has emerged as a distinctive mode of contemporary arts practice that has influenced all arts disciplines—dance, theatre, music, literature, film and visual art."[7]

To continue to exercise this leadership, media artists and organizations must keep pace with evolving technical developments, and have access to the combination of resources, technical facilities and expertise and advanced training necessary to produce and disseminate work. These represent significant costs to artists and organizations. The constant introduction of new technologies requires continual adaptation. Media Arts organizations are facing equipment, software and skills upgrades requiring new investments in infrastructure and staff training.

A number of organizations and funders recognize that special resources that will be required to maintain the momentum of Media Arts development. In its submission to the federal government consultation on a national digital economy strategy, the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) noted the essential role of ongoing life–long learning in the adoption of digital tools and technologies, requiring "a broadly based approach to the accessibility of training and education in communities across Canada [and that] a variety of community–based organiza-

[3] *Accroître l'avantage numérique du Canada - Stratégies pour une prospérité durable: Les arts médiatiques et numériques*, National Digital Economy Consultation Comments of the Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques, July 2010, p.3.

[4] *Canadian Digital Media Content Creation Technology Roadmap*, Centre de Gestion Publique Inc., Cultural Human Resources Council, 2009

5 *Summary of Findings, NAMAC Regional Gatherings,* National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, 2010

[6] See the *Cultural HR Study 2010,* prepared by the Conference Board of Canada for the Cultural Human Resources Council, 2010

[7] *New Media Arts Scoping Study*, Australia Council for the Arts with the Australian Government, September 2006

tions should be included in the delivery system for this training to complement the formal education system."[8] In an earlier letter to the Executive Director of the Canada Council for the Arts, the IMAA noted that, "Media Arts organizations struggle to keep pace with changing technologies in order to serve their members. Standards are constantly changing, which dramatically affects the ability for independent film, video, and new media artists to access festivals, distributors, and broadcasters."[9]

The Conseil des arts et lettres du Québec has asserted that media artists need specialized technical expertise, and access to resources and support to take advantage of sophisticated digital production and distribution opportunities and resources to meet the challenge of a higher individual workload [occasioned by taking on more production and distribution tasks].[10]  The Cultural Human Resources Council also recently noted that, "Steps must be taken to ensure that the cultural workforce has the combination of creative, technical and entrepreneurial skills necessary in the digital world to realize Canada's "digital advantage."[11]

As noted in one recent study, "Only a few Canadian artist-run production facilities have the expertise and facilities to support new media production and exhibition. (e.g. SAT, Interaccess, Oboro, SOIL)."[12] More advanced research and production facilities are more often associated with universities. The need for sufficient spaces is great for Media Arts organizations in Ontario. A study of capital needs in the arts found that 77% of Ontario visual and Media Arts organizations surveyed reported insufficient access to at least one type of space.[13]

### 1.3 Archival Preservation

As the Media Arts sector matures, a number of studies report the need to address archival preservation in artist-run centres, some of which have now been in existence for several decades. The preservation needs in Media Arts are compounded by questions relating to the virtual nature of some artworks. Work has been done in this area and standards developed. However, artist-run organizations are challenged in finding the resources necessary to undertake archival preservation.[14]

## 2. The Challenge of Reaching Audiences

### 2.1 A Crowded Marketplace

As noted in the CPAF study, "The digital transition allows artists to replace physical objects with electronic files and to displace distribution over time and between places with instantaneous distribution over networks."[15]  Broadband Internet and wireless technologies offer new ways to promote and exhibit Media Arts, and to engage the audience and build communities around their experience. However these developments present the viewer or user with an in-

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[8] *Building a Digital Media Arts Culture for Canada*, Submission to the federal consultation on a national digital economy strategy, Independent Media Arts Alliance, 2010

[9] http://www.imaa.ca/eeuploads/pdfs/0605LettertoRobertSirman.pdf

[10]  *Option numérique : document de consultation*, Op. Cit., p. 1

[11] *Digital Media Content Creation Technology Roadmap,* Cultural Human Resources Council, 2009

[12] *Digital Transitions and the Impact of New Technologies on the Arts*, Prepared by David Poole for Canadian Public Arts Funders, 2011, page 20

[13] *Facility Needs Assessment Survey Update Report*, Artsbuild Ontario, February 2010

[14] *The Distinct Role of Artist-Run Centres in the Canadian Visual Arts Ecology*, Prepared by MDR Burgess Consultants, for the Canada Council for the Arts, 2012

[15] *Digital Transitions and the Impact of New Technologies on the Arts*, Op. Cit.

credible array of choices, driving an already crowded market place for the arts to an even more crowded global marketplace online.

The Internet may provide instant access to global audiences, but the challenge of being seen online is daunting. As noted by a recent report published by the American National Alliance of Media Art & Culture (NAMAC), with so many content options discoverability online is a challenge for media artists.[16]

As the 2011 Ontario Arts Engagement study revealed, "Media-based consumption reaches deeply into the Ontario population and plays a pivotal role in the overall landscape of arts engagement." 94% of Ontarians watch movies on a computer, TV or DVD, while 83% listen to music and sound recordings at home, in the car and elsewhere. The challenges for Media Arts organizations to find their public in this environment are enormous and demand significant investments of resources and ingenuity to engage with the public as well as communities of practice and communities of users.

Media arts compete for audiences off-line as well. Audience time and attention is being compressed in larger centres, where cultural consumers have more to choose from. A recent study on audience building for Media Arts stated that, "Media arts organizations are competing for audience attention nor only with large cultural institutions such as major mueums and galleries, theatre, music and dance events and mainstream movies, but also with a vast wealth of cultural material available from broadcasters or online, much of it free and available at the convenience of the user."[17]

Ubiquitous online and wireless networks and widespread adoption of social media have helped to establish a participatory paradigm of creation and distribution of media productions across multiple platforms, with multiple points of audience engagement. In this new environment, Media Arts organizations need to ensure they are using these platforms to reach out to their publics. However, as one study notes, "For most Media Arts organizations, this is an era of "both/and" in which they must have a dynamic online presence as well as opportunities for face-to-face interaction and community building."[18]

## 2.2. Need for Improved Access to Broadband Networks in Remote Areas

The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) recently signalled the need for better broadband infrastructure in remote areas to ensure that creators and audiences can take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital media, stating that, "Special attention needs to be given to remote Aboriginal communities to ensure that they are not left behind and benefit fully from Canada's digital economy." The APTN also recommended that the government of Canada require Internet service providers to provide full service to remote areas as a condition of access to public spectrum.[19]

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[16] *Summary of Findings: NAMAC Regional Gatherings, 2010*

[17] *"Never Enough Time or Resources": Building Audience Development Capacities of Media Arts Organizations in Ontario," prepared by Chris Gehman for MANO/RAMO, May 2011.*

[18] *Summary of Findings, NAMAC Regional Meetings*, January 2011, Paula Manley

19 *Improving Aboriginal Peoples' Place in Canada's Digital Economy*, *Consultation on a Digital Economy Strategy in Canada, Comments of Aboriginal Peoples Television Network Incorporated*, July, 2010

### 2.3 Copyright Issues

At the same time, artists and their organizations have signalled to the government in numerous submissions the need for adequate copyright protection for their work.[20]

## 3. Ontario is Becoming More Diverse

### 3.1 Members of Visible Minorities and Aboriginal Peoples are the Fastest Growing Populations in Ontario

The Ontario population is also increasingly diverse, with the fastest population growth among immigrants and members of visible minorities. At the 2006 Census, close to three million Ontarians identified themselves to belonging to a visible minority. Members of visible minorities and Aboriginal people are the fastest growing populations in Ontario.

According to a report published by the Trillium Foundation, "Immigrants and members of visible minorities tend to be concentrated in specific areas of the province, such as Southern and Central Ontario; and the province's largest urban centres, especially the Greater Toronto and Golden Horseshoe areas. In contrast, far fewer people in the northern regions of Ontario say they are a member of a visible minority (less than 2%) and very few recent immigrants are settling in the northern areas of the province."[21]

Growth amongst the Aboriginal population is also outpacing other populations.[22] The Aboriginal population is expected to grow to about 2 million people, with most (over 60%) living outside of major cities. Of those living in cities, by 2031, the largest Aboriginal populations would be found in Thunder Bay, Greater Sudbury, Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Regina, while Toronto would have the smallest proportion. On the whole, a greater proportion of Aboriginal people are under 40 years old.[23] As one report signalled "young people are technology natives, while older people are technology immigrants." By contrast, the non-Aboriginal population is becoming progressively older.

These demographic shifts are changing the face of Ontario communities and communities of artistic practice. In this environment, cultural organizations are increasingly called upon to reach out to and engage with the diversity of communities that surround them.

## 4.The Challenge of Positioning the Media Arts in the New Creative Economy

### 4.1 Greater Policy Focus on Digital Media

In recent years, the role of digital media in driving a new "creative economy" has caught the attention of policy makers. In Ontario, the government published its framework for continued

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[20] See for example, http://www.carcc.ca/news.html

[21] *Diversity in Ontario: A Community Profile*, Ontario Trillium Foundation. Report based on Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001 and 2006.

[22] http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/abor/canada.cfm. Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Wednesday, April 2, 2008, "2006 Census: Ethnic origin, visible minorities, place of work and mode of transportation." http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080402/d1080402a-eng.htm. "Visible minority population surpasses 5-million mark."

[23] http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/111207/dq111207a-eng.htm; http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100309/dq100309a-eng.htm

growth of its entertainment and creative clusters.[24] This industrial strategy recognizes the central role played by the arts and cultural workers, whose skills and expertise are at the core of the creative industries.

Similarly, the federal government held a national consultation in 2010 on a future national digital economy strategy. In its consultation paper, the government discusses digital media creators as being, "at the centre of all creative industries, producing information, entertainment, services and applications using digital technology."[25]

Recognition of the central place of arts expertise in the new economy presents significant opportunities to attract new understanding and resources to the arts. However, there is also a danger of missing opportunities because of the narrow economic focus currently being brought. A study in Australia notes the expectation that media artists will necessarily compete in the commercially-driven, digital content economy...that they will become 'content providers.'"[26] There is a need to bring greater awareness to policy makers of the important role played by Media Arts organizations in the greater cultural ecology and how artistic practice supports the development of a creative economy.

### 4.2 Lack of Awareness of Media Arts

In his study on audience building for the Media Arts sector, Chris Gehman discusses the lack of visibility of the Media Arts, both amongst the general public, but also in the arts sector, stating that, "the term Media Arts itself has no currency with the general public, or even with segments of the public with an investment in the arts and/or mass media, in contrast to the general understanding ot the terms 'fine arts' or 'performing arts', each of which is widely understood as an umbrella term covering a number of artistic disciplines."[27]

This lack of visibilty has implications for the ability of the Media Arts sector to mobilize and benefit from ongoing digital policy development. As a recent study by NAMAC found, the lack of public awareness of the Media Arts means that organizations "are continually working to reframe their work and their role."[28]

The province of Quebec provides an interesting example, having recently concluded a province-wide consultation on the impact of digital technologies in all the arts and cultural industries. These consultations are expected to result in a new province wide digital cultural strategy. In the meantime, the Conseil des arts et lettres du Quebec (CALQ), the Quebec equivalent of the Ontario Arts Council, has, as a result of its consultations, recognized the need to support artists for the creation of online platforms, for artistic residencies, to access expertise and equipment in the private sector and in universities, for emerging artistic practices, and

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[24] *Ontario's Entertainment and Creative Cluster: A Framework for Growth*, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Ontario, 2011

[25] *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage: Strategies for Sustainable Prosperity*, Consultation Paper on a Digital Economy Strategy for Canada, 2010

[26] *New Media Arts Scoping Study*, Australia Council for the Arts with the Australian Government, September 2006

[27] *"Never Enough Time or Resources": Building Audience Development Capacities of Media Arts Organizations in Ontario,"*, Op. Cit.

[28] *Summary of Findings, NAMAC Regional Gatherings, Op. Cit.;* See also *Building a Digital Media Arts Culture for Canada*, Op. Cit.

critical practices. The consultations have resulted in the creation of a new Digital Arts Program at the CALQ.[29]

## 5. Funding Challenges

### 5.1 Growing Trend Towards Private Sector Funding

There is a growing trend to support organizations to access a greater share of private sector funding. Increased funding from the private sector is being encouraged through provincial and national programs aimed at arts organizations, as well as through private sector initiatives, such as the ArtsVest program of Business for the Arts, being delivered with matching federal funding and in partnership with municipal arts councils.

These are potentially positive developments that could help develop more diversified funding structures for arts organizations. However, there are a number of challenges associated with access to private sector funding for Media Arts. It has been said that the lack of visibility for the Media Arts sector has an impact on efforts to attract major private sponsors. The lack of a clear identity and value proposition for private sector funders means that Media Arts organizations must work harder to demonstrate their value and impact.

Private sector funding, while potentially promising, has also been hampered by economic turbulence of recent years and ongoing global economic uncertainty. In this environment, public giving as well as volunteering in the arts have reportedly declined.[30]

### 5.2 Cuts to Independent Filmmaking Putting Pressure on Arts Councils

As a result of the economic recession of 2008 and ongoing economic uncertainty, significant funding cuts are being implemented at all levels to reign in government spending, both in Canada and abroad. Recent cuts to documentary filmmaking supported through cultural industry programs are reportedly putting pressure on limited arts council funds. As more cuts are anticipated to independent filmmaking that has been supported through cultural industry programs, this situation could worsen.[31]

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[29] *Option Numerique: Scenarios d'action*, Op. Cit.

[30] André Courchesne and Johanne Turbide, L'économie des arts en temps de crise, HEC, Montreal, November, 2009; *The Recession & the Arts. The Impact of the Economic Downturn on Nonprofit Cultural Groups in New York City, Alliance for the Arts, 2009. http://www.allianceforarts.org/images/EcImpact- Survey_2009report.pdf; The Impact of the Recession on the Arts. Arts Council of England 2009, http://www.artscouncil.org. uk/aboutus/project_detail.php?rid=0&sid=&brows e=recent&id=1132;*

31 *Building a Digital Media Arts Culture for Canada*, Op. Cit. See also, "Telefilm Canada plans additional $7.9 million in programming cuts over two years," Playback Online, May 3, 2012. http://playbackonline.ca/2012/05/03/telefilm-canada-plans-additional-7-9-million-in-programming-cuts-over-two-years/

## C. Questions for Discussion

1. What role should MANO/RAMO play in strengthening the network of Ontario Media Arts organizations? Is there a need for a concerted vision with respect to the network of Media Arts infrastructure in the province? Is there a need for a provincial preservation and archiving strategy?

2. What role should MANO/RAMO play in raising the profile of Media Arts with policy makers? With other arts organizations? With potential sponsors and funders in the private sector? With the general public?

3. How can MANO/RAMO help Media Arts organizations become more sustainable? Is there a need for better information on the important role being played by Media Arts organizations in local communities and services that are being provided to artists, the public at large? Is there a need for Board or management support in Media Arts organizations to take advantage of technical, financial or other opportunities?

4. What role can MANO/RAMO play in supporting Media Arts organizations to reach out to all communities? to emerging artists and youth audiences?  to Aboriginal artists and audiences? to artists and audiences who are visible minorities?

5. What role should MANO/RAMO play in supporting artists to take advantage of the creative opportunities afforded by digital technologies? What role should MANO/RAMO play in assuring that media artists have access to training and skills development opportunities? To artistic residencies? To production, distribution or exhibition opportunities?

6. Should MANO/RAMO play a role in supporting networking between Media Arts organizations and artists across the province? What events or activities should it support or undertake? Should MANO/RAMO take the lead on certain initiatives?